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ABSTRACT

This booklet is designed to help distance learning participants learn to work independently, be self-disciplined, take responsibility for their own work, study, and manage their time. It describes the support built into the distance learning program, such as the instructor, advisor, e-mail partner, supervisor, and program coordinator. Advantages to distance learning are listed, and the three keys to success--decision making, dedication, and planning--are discussed. A section on getting started and being prepared covers these topics: how to choose units, preparation, discipline, and identification of one's learning style. The rest of the booklet provides pointers on how to study more effectively. The following topics are covered in this section: setting study goals, improving concentration, minimizing distraction, and managing time. Some sample time management forms are appended. (YLB)

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OMRDD/REACH/CUNY DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAM

HOW TO STUDY AND MANAGE YOUR TIME EFFECTIVELY

When Working on the Distance Learning Program

by

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Dear Participants:

Distance learning is quite different from the traditional classroom model where a teacher lectures to a classroom of students. In a distance learning program you work independently. Independent learning requires self-discipline and taking responsibility for your own work. This is difficult for most people. How you study and manage your time will determine your success.

Remember, you are not alone. Built into the Distance Learning Program are many supports:

- Your instructor will call you every week to discuss your work and progress. S/he will comment on your assignments and assist you in planning which units and activities you want to work on. Don't hesitate to e-mail or call your instructor whenever you need help or guidance.

- Your advisor will call you periodically to see how you are doing. S/he will help you with any problems you may have working on the Distance Learning Program at your work site. S/he is available to help you plan for future occupational or educational goals.

- Your e-mail partner is another student in the Distance Learning Program. You will work together on some learning activities. But feel free to write your e-mail partner whenever you wish, to share experiences or just to "chat".

- Your supervisor has agreed to support your work on the Distance Learning Program. S/he will work out appropriate release time with you. The program coordinator at your DDSO (usually a member of your Training and Staff Development department) is also available to make sure your participation in the program runs smoothly.

There are many advantages to distance learning:

- You have control over your time and learning.
- You can study and learn at your own rate.
- You can learn at your own work site.

Independent learning is your own personal challenge to success.

> To succeed in school as well as in life requires that you learn ... [some universal principles for living] and practice them each day. Some of these universal principles for living are:
> 1) There are no secrets to success.
> 2) Success is difficult; it requires hard work. There are no easy shortcuts ...
> 3) Your success is your responsibility.
> Each of us must "pay our dues" to achieve anything of significant value. You have to give in order to get; successful people give a great deal of their time and energy and, in some cases, make great personal sacrifice to achieve their goals.[1]

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[1]Semones, J. (1991). Effective Study Skills: A Step-By-Step System for Achieving Student Success. Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, Inc., pp. 4-6

There are 3 keys to success:

1. Decision Making - this is where it begins. You are where you are today because you decided not to be somewhere else. A decision is a conclusion, meaning you have already settled what it is that you want. By deciding to enroll in the Distance Learning Program, you've taken a step toward self-improvement and reaching a long-term goal.

2. Dedication - total devotion to a plan. You are willing to commit yourself to get what you want. Anything worth having in life is worth going through the sacrifice.

3. Planning - gets you where you want to go. The plan breaks down your goals into individual parts and organizes them into specific step-by-step actions.

GETTING STARTED AND BEING PREPARED

How to Choose Units

1. The first 24 Units, the Introductory Units, are ones that are done by everyone during the first 6 weeks of the Program.
2. You will develop your own Individualized Educational Plan, in consultation with your instructor, by choosing Units to work on from your second package of materials, Units 25-105.
3. Deciding which Units to work on is a simple process. Look at the Table of Contents to see what the different Theme Areas are and what each Unit covers. Put check marks next to the Units in the

Table of Contents if:

1) This is an area you'd like to review (√),

2) This area needs improvement (√√), or

3) This area is a problem area for you (√√√).

Now go through the Table of Contents again and put a star next to the Units you know well. You may be surprised at how many areas you're good at.

4. You'll want to develop a plan where you work mostly on your problem areas (the ones with 3 checks), but also include some areas that need improvement (2 checks), and that you want to review (one check) to give variety in different levels of activities. Remember, choose units that meet what you consider to be your own needs, not what someone else tells you your needs are.

After you have decided what units to work on, ask yourself: "What can I learn from this? How can working on this unit help me on the job? What goals can I accomplish from learning this?"

Preparation

When you sit down to work on the Distance Learning Program, do your best to be physically comfortable. If possible, wear loose, comfortable clothes on the days you will be studying at the job. Make sure your books and materials are at hand. You may find it helpful to spend the last few minutes of each study session checking to see if you have all the materials you need for the next session. Each work site is different. It may be hard to find an ideal place to work on the program. But if at all possible, make sure that you've got enough light. Try to see that the room isn't too hot or too cold. Try to work away from distracting noises.

Discipline

Discipline is your key to success. It is the ability to do what you're suppose to do when no one is looking. Discipline means making a total commitment to your studying plans, and schedules. You've probably had an experience you're proud of where you've disciplined yourself to do something well (such as maintain an exercise schedule) or break a bad habit (such as smoking). Take a moment to think about a time in your life when you used discipline successfully. Jot down the answers to the following questions.

1. What did you do?

2. What made it easier?

3. What made it harder?

4. How did you feel when you accomplished what you were trying to do?

5. List other goals you've achieved through discipline.

Refer to your answers to these questions when you get discouraged or feel hopeless. You've accomplished what you wanted before. You can do it again now!

Identify your Learning Style

Everyone has a different learning style. Your learning style is your way of approaching learning that works best for you and enables you to reach your maximum potential. Read the table on the next page. For each category, underline the learning styles that apply to you. Review the categories you've underlined. This is your learning style profile.

Although you may be limited at your work site, try to make as many adjustments as possible to match your learning style profile. See if you become more productive.

Keep your learning style profile in mind in the future when you are enrolled in other courses or studying for recertification exams.

Learning Styles[2]

Biological	Emotions and Attitudes	Environment	Learning Groups	Sensory
Intake Some people require food or drink while they work.	Motivation Motivation is the desire to achieve academically. Some are positive about going to school, others aren't interested.	Noise level Quiet or sound. Some people need quiet when they are learning, while others can block out sound. Some people are not comfortable unless there is noise and activity around them.	Learning alone Some prefer to study by themselves.	Auditory Some people learn best by listening to verbal instruction.

[2] Rita & Kenneth Dunn, as quoted in Kline, P. & Martel, L. (1992). School Success. Learning Matters.

Time of day When is your best time for maximum concentration? Early morning, late morning, afternoon or evening?	**Persistence** Are you inclined to complete tasks or take intermittent breaks and return to assignments later?	**Light** Low and bright. Some people work best under bright light, others find bright light harsh and irritating.	**Pairs** Some prefer to learn with another person.	**Seeing words** Some learn best by seeing and reading words.
Mobility How quietly can you sit and for how long? Some need frequent breaks, others can sit for hours while learning.	**Responsibility** Some people have no trouble following directions and meeting the teacher's demands. Others feel irritated and turned off when they are asked to complete a task a certain way. They prefer to have more of a say in how a task is carried out.	**Temperature** Many students can't think when they feel hot and others can't when they are cold.	**Authority figure present** Some feel more comfortable with an authority figure or teacher.	**Seeing pictures** Some people's primary perceptual strength is visual and can recall what they've seen or observed.

Global/Analytic Global learners like to see the whole picture first, while analytic learners start at the beginning and proceed step by step.	**Structure** Your need for specific directions or explanations prior to undertaking or completing an assignment.	**Setting** Informal or formal. Many think best in formal environment, seated on wooden, steel or plastic chairs, while others do better on a lounge chair, a bed, the floor, on pillows or on carpeting.	**Prefer variety** Some learn easily alone and also with other people present (peers or authority figure).	**Touching** If your perceptual strengths are tactile, then you need to touch things in order to learn well.
				Doing/moving If you're a learner with kinesthetic preferences, you require whole body movement or real-life experiences to learn.

PRODUCTIVE STUDY TIME

In a Distance Learning Program, what you learn is keyed to self-motivation. But this is true even in a traditional classroom as expressed in the following quote:

> All genuine learning is self-education. In order for us to learn, we must want to be taught. As human beings, we have the capacity within us to learn what no one can teach us. Accept that learning is something no one can do for you.... Even in the classroom, in the midst of your fellow students, you will be learning on your own.[3]

A few minutes of study can be more effective than several hours if you have good study habits.

The rest of this booklet will give you some pointers on how to study more effectively. Although you will be able to apply most of what you read to your work on the Distance Learning Program, some of it will not be applicable or may be difficult to implement. (For example, you may not be able to change into loose fitting comfortable clothes or you may not be able to adjust the temperature in the room.)

Even if you can't apply all the suggestions given here to your current program, keep them in mind. They will be helpful if you decide to take a college or continuing education course and as you study your upgrade and recertification materials.

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[3]Armstrong, W. H. and Lampe II, M. W (1990). Study Tips: How To Study Effectively and Get Better Grades. Hauppauge, NY: Barron's Educational Series, Inc., p.24.

The following topics will be covered in this section:

- Setting Study Goals
- Improving Your Concentration
- Minimizing Distraction
- Managing Your Time

Setting Study Goals

Setting goals is the best way to motivate yourself to study effectively. When you have a specific goal in mind you know what you want to achieve, and that makes it easier to achieve it. Setting study goals enables you to study with a purpose. Starting every study assignment with specific study goals gives focus to your work.

Steps in Setting Study Goals

1. Determine your goal. What are your goals for the Distance Learning Program? Make a list of those goals.

2. Make a list of the tasks you must complete to achieve each goal. For the Distance Learning Program, each Unit or Learning Activity can be viewed as a task that needs to be completed. List the Units you have to complete to meet your goals.

3. Note how much time you need to complete each task. You will know how much time it takes you to complete a Unit or Learning Activity after you have worked on the Distance Learning Program for awhile.

4. Arrange tasks in order of importance. There may be many Units you want to work on to improve your writing. but the specific Learning Activities on Writing Incident Reports may be more important to you if this is an area you need brushing up on.

5. Plan to spend a specific study period completing your study tasks. The Distance Learning Program builds in four hours of release time to work on the program. When you are studying on your own you have to make your own schedule.

6. Use a check list to record your progress as you complete your tasks. Record, next to each task the actual date it was completed.

The table below gives for an example of one worker's record of study goals.

Study Goals

Goal	Tasks	Time Needed	Study Period Month/Day	Date Completed
Improve Writing	Write log	3 hrs.	2/3, 4, 5	2/5/96
	Write Incident Reports	4 hrs.	2/8, 9, 10, 11	2/11/96
Improve Spelling	Learn to use spell checker	2 hrs.	2/14, 2/15	215/96
Use Verbs Correctly	Read Bazerman Unit 1, Section 2.	1 hr.	2/16	2/16/96

Improving Your Concentration

Generally speaking, most of us are aware of the fact that we do not have enough time to do many of the things that we would want to do within the limited time we have. We fail, however, to accept the fact that we can do only one thing at a time, particularly when time is limited. Since there are many things competing for our time, it's often hard for us to concentrate. Accepting the fact that we can only do one thing at a time can improve our concentration when we sit down to do our schoolwork or other assignments.[4]

Acknowledge your concentration span. How long can you study before your mind wanders to something else? Fifteen minutes, twenty-five minutes? When you schedule your time, schedule mini-breaks that coincide with the time you're most likely to lose your concentration. Get up, stretch, get a drink of water or a breath of fresh air. When scheduling your mini breaks, make sure to stick to them. A 10-minute break shouldn't end up lasting a half hour.

Minimizing Distractions

If possible, you should work in a well-structured study space, with books and materials at hand. Before studying, spend a few minutes to set up your study space. Get a comfortable chair and face it towards a bare wall. Avoid facing windows. Clear your desk or table space of objects except those used for your study. This will minimize visual distractions.

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[4]Silver, T. (1992). Study Smart: Hands-on, Nuts and Bolts Techniques for Earning Higher Grades. New York: Villard Books, pp. 283, 286.

Sounds are the hardest to block out: doors slam, phones ring, horns honk, and people move around. The quieter the study area, the more distracting sounds become. You may find it helpful to play soft background music on the radio.

Respect your study time. Help others to be mindful of the importance of your study time. Inform as many people as you can of your scheduled study time. This will help avoid the distraction of unexpected visitors and the telephone ringing.

Managing Your Time

Time management starts with being able to:

- Set goals and make priorities. This gives you a sense of what has to be done and when.
- Do important things first. Important things become pressing and use up more of our time when we avoid doing them.
- Say "No". There will be many interruptions and requests for your time. Anything that is not in your schedule, can be scheduled later.
- Start and stop specific activities at predetermined times. This enables you to concentrate on the task at hand.
- Make "to do" lists and schedules.

Before organizing your study time examine your daily routine including meals, travel, work, appointments, etc. How much time does it take for each task. Now decide how much study time you need, when you want to study, and how studying fits in with the rest of your activities.

Daily "To Do" List - Get in the habit of making a daily "to do" list that combines your scheduled activities and the important things you want to do that day. After listing what you want to do, code the most important items and make sure you give them priority over less important items.

Weekly Schedules - To decide what is important, you need to know your week's schedule. Start each week by making a schedule. Fill in work time, study time, important events, etc.

Monthly Schedule - A monthly schedule can help you look more broadly at what you want to accomplish. The task you list on your monthly schedule can be incorporated into your weekly and daily schedules.

At the end of each day, week or month review your schedules. Observe how well your time schedules work for you. Make adjustments as needed.

Samples of lists and schedules appear in the following pages. Duplicate them and make them part of your daily life. Good Luck!

daily to do list

√	phone calls and appointments

√ priority	tasks to be accomplished today	√ done

weekly schedule

Hours	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6 - 7							
7 - 8							
8 - 9							
9 - 10							
10 - 11							
11 - 12							
12 - 1							
1 - 2							
2 - 3							
3 - 4							
4 - 5							
5 - 6							
6 - 7							
7 - 8							
8 - 9							
9 - 10							
10 - 11							
11 - 12							

schedule for the month of _____

tasks to do	due date	schedule date	date accomplished